

November 1, 2021

The Honorable Christine P. Barber
The Honorable Mike Connolly
The Honorable Erika Uytterhoeven
State House
Boston, MA

Dear Representatives Barber, Connolly, and Uytterhoeven:

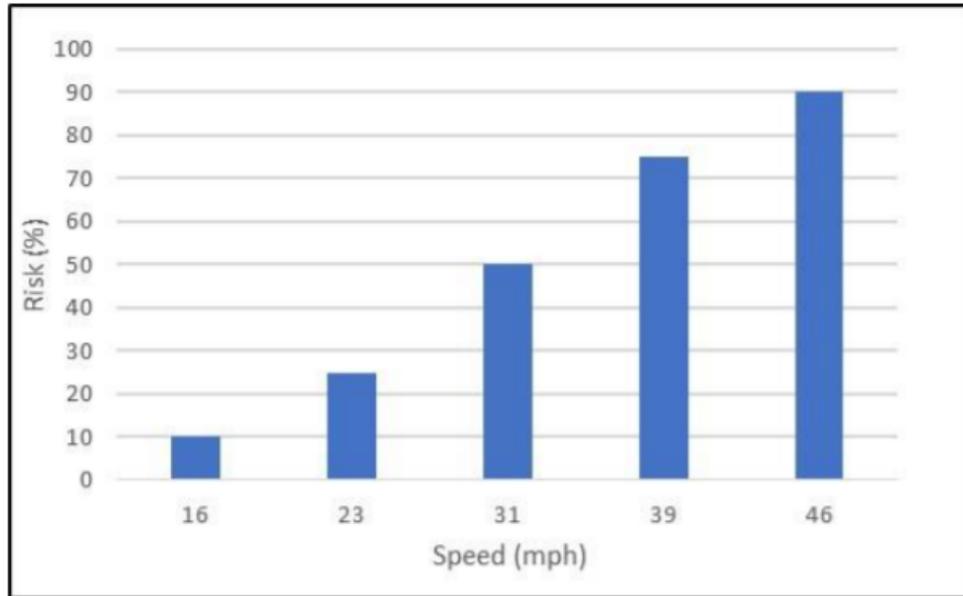
As the City of Somerville's Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee, we are writing to express our support for legislation that would allow cities and towns to install and operate road safety cameras to enforce traffic laws. In addition to statewide legislation, we encourage you to support the home rule petition approved by Somerville's City Council on October 28, which would allow automated enforcement in designated safety zones in Somerville.

We are aware of two bills currently before the House of Representatives that would provide for automated enforcement of traffic signals and speed limits: H. 2532 and H. 2426. Both bills would create a time-limited pilot program that would allow cities and towns in Massachusetts to install road safety cameras. A separate bill, H. 2494, would allow cities and towns to install cameras for automated enforcement of bus lane violations. Senator Jehlen is a cosponsor of S. 1545, the companion to H. 2426, and we have written separately to thank her for her support of this bill.

We believe that any of these bills would be a positive step for pedestrians and transit riders, and we encourage you to work toward passing them. We would also like to encourage you to remove some of the restrictive provisions in the current bills. Specifically, H. 2426 caps the number of camera systems for a city of Somerville's size at 4 and caps the number of municipalities allowed to operate these systems at 10.

Speed kills, and reducing vehicle speeds is essential to making streets and sidewalks safe for the many thousands of people in Somerville who get around the city as pedestrians. Many studies have shown the dramatic difference a few miles per hour can make to the risk of injury and death (see figure below). We feel this danger every day when we walk to the grocery store, or to work, or to take our kids to school.

Figure: Effect of motor vehicle speed on pedestrian risk of severe crash injury



Source: National Transportation Safety Board, Pedestrian Safety, Special Investigation Report NTSB/SIR-18/03, September 25, 2018, page 8.

Automated enforcement is one tool that works to reduce vehicle speeds and prevent injuries from car crashes. It has proven effective in cities across the world, including Chicago ([link to Streetsblog Chicago article reporting on a Northwestern University study](#)) and New York ([link to NYC DOT, Automated Speed Enforcement Program Report 2014-2017](#)). The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) reviewed U.S. and foreign case studies in its January 2021 Review of Vision Zero Strategies ([link](#)). According to the MPO,

All of our international case studies mention automated enforcement as a key strategy. Portland, Oregon, and Washington, DC, saw 53 percent and 70 percent decreases in fatalities, respectively, after implementing [automated speed enforcement]. The rate of vehicles speeding 10 mph over the speed limit in Washington, DC, fell from 1 in 3 to 1 in 40 (Phillips and Monzón 2015); the presence of speed cameras in Montgomery County, Maryland, resulted in a 59 percent reduction in the likelihood for drivers to speed 10 mph over the speed limit when compared with similar roadways in two nearby Virginia counties without cameras (Hu and McCartt 2015).

Once legally authorized, automated speed enforcement can be implemented quickly, and this is an advantage it has over other Vision Zero strategies. We believe that street design is the best way to end traffic violence; streets where dangerous driving is physically difficult or impossible can make life outside of a car safe and pleasant. However, building better streets takes time, and even recently reconstructed streets in Somerville are often too forgiving of dangerous speeds. Beacon Street, where reconstruction began in 2016 and ended in 2019, is an example of both the time it takes to design and build streets and the often imperfect results. By contrast,

road safety cameras can be installed in a matter of months and could begin improving safety citywide on a much shorter timescale than a redesign of all our streets.

The bills to create a pilot automated enforcement program in Massachusetts would be a good step forward. Both H. 2532 and H. 2426 include ample safeguards to address concerns about automated enforcement, such as the concern that municipalities could prioritize revenue over safety.

However, H. 2426 (also introduced in the Senate as S. 1545) has two key limitations that greatly reduce its potential positive effect on pedestrian safety. First, it would cap the number of municipalities that can participate. Only 10 of Massachusetts's 351 municipalities would be allowed to operate road safety cameras at one time (Section 10A). Second, it would severely limit the number of road safety camera systems. Cities and towns would be restricted to one automated road safety camera system per 20,000 residents (Section 2(b)).

For Somerville, this would mean cameras at only 4 locations in the entire city. This limited number means that the program would have a small effect at best. Additionally, since Somerville would not be able to install road safety cameras throughout the city, the limitation could lead to concerns about fairness based on where the cameras are placed. Ensuring fairness by removing police discretion from traffic enforcement is another key advantage of automated enforcement, and it would be unfortunate to undermine this advantage by not allowing cities to distribute cameras widely.

We also support H. 2494 (automated enforcement of bus lanes). As bus riders, we have been happy to see bus lanes installed in Somerville in recent years, including on Broadway and on Washington Street. Dedicated lanes for buses make service more reliable, encourage more people to choose efficient and environmentally friendly modes of transportation, and promote equitable use of our public space, preventing buses carrying dozens of people from being stuck behind single-occupancy vehicles. However, a single vehicle parked or stopped in the bus lane can make the bus lane useless. Camera enforcement will not solve this problem by itself, but it would help. Additionally, this bill would allow Somerville, with permission from MassDOT or DCR, to enforce bus lane violations on state roads. Drivers routinely ignore the pilot bus lanes on Mystic Avenue, and the state has left these lanes unenforced.

We encourage you to work toward passing H. 2532, H. 2426, and H. 2494, and to support enactment of Somerville's home rule petition. This legislation, especially if amended to remove the limitations on the number of cities and number of cameras, would allow cities across Massachusetts to use an effective tool to promote pedestrian safety and improve bus service. Automated enforcement is a proven strategy to prevent injury and death, and we should be allowed to use it, not just test it out as a pilot program, here in Somerville.

Sincerely,

The Somerville Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee

Zach Rosenberg, Chair
Ginny Alverson, Vice Chair
Audrey Orenstein, Secretary
Ted Alexander
Laura Evans
Paola Massoli
Vitor Pamplona
Julia Toof
Emily Vides